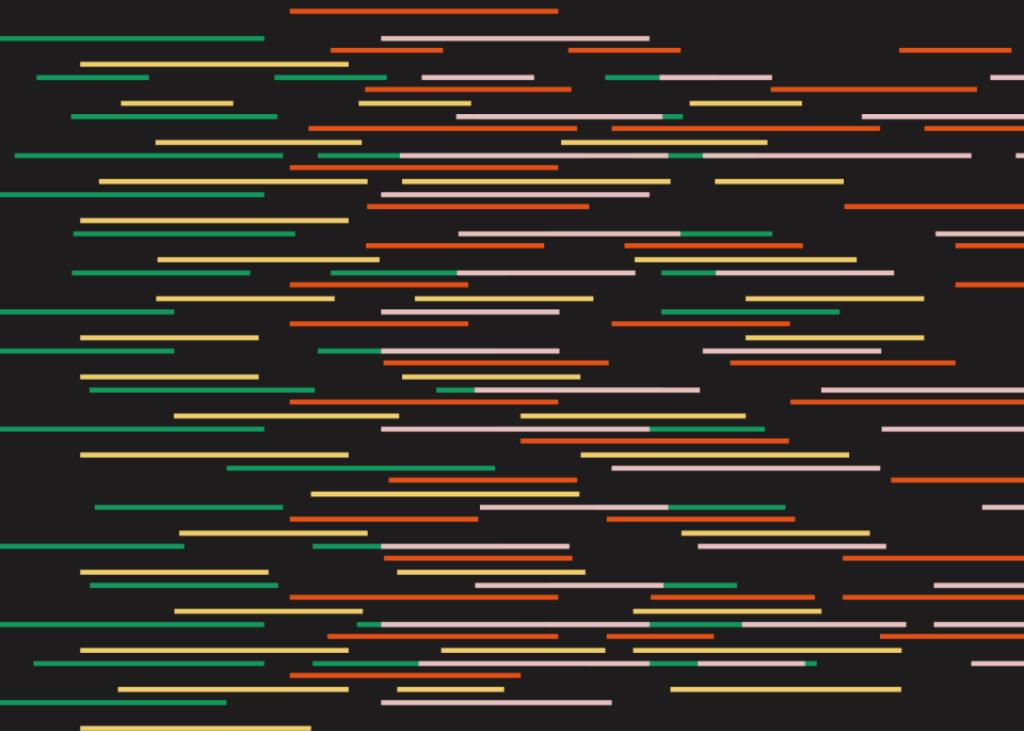


# To Live is Christ 2026

A Year of Presence and Purpose



Cornerstone Bible Fellowship

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# Why Fast?

No practice of Jesus is more alien or neglected in the Western church than fasting. In the post-enlightenment landscape, where human beings are viewed as “thinking things”, the idea of drawing on the Spirit’s power, not through your mind, but through your stomach, sounds absurd. Few followers of Jesus regularly fast anymore, and yet until recent history, fasting was one of the core practices of the way of Jesus. For hundreds of years, the church would fast twice a week, Wednesdays and Fridays. That was just what you did if you were a Christian. In the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, when the church developed the practice of Lent, it was originally a fast similar to Islam's Ramadan. As a lead-up to Easter, followers of Jesus would wake and go without food until sunset for 40 days every year. Please note, go without food. People regularly use the term fasting for other forms of abstinence, such as “I’m fasting from social media or tv or online shopping.” That’s great, but it’s not fasting, it’s abstinence. And it’s still a helpful practice in the longstanding Way of Jesus. But fasting is a practice by which you deny your body food in an attempt to starve your flesh. It is a psychosomatic act in the true sense of the word that’s built around a biblical theology of the soul as your whole person. Your body is not evil, your body is a gift. As is pleasure in the right time and place and way. But your body, like the rest of your soul, has been corrupted by sin. As a result, your body often works against you in your fight with the flesh, via your sex drive, fight or flight system, or survival instincts. Fasting is a way to turn your body into an ally in your fight with the flesh rather than an adversary.

## Practice Suffering, Increase Joy, Fight Sin

At first, fasting likely won't feel like this great access to power. Richard Foster astutely observed, "More than any other discipline, fasting reveals the things that control us."

Very few practices have the capacity to humble us as does fasting. When you begin fasting, it's common to feel sad, anxious, or even just plain hangry. With regular practice, these feelings mostly go away and are replaced with joy, contentment, a sense of intimacy with God, and spiritual power. But it takes a while to wean your soul off the gods of pleasure, instant gratification, and sensory appetites. The first thing it normally does is reveal where you are still in bondage. Fasting trains our bodies to not get what they want- at least not all the time. This is yet another reason in a culture so run by feelings and desires that fasting is a bizarre idea even to Christians. We assume that we must get what we want to be happy, and by want, we often mean what our flesh wants. This simply isn't true. With fasting, we decide of our own accord not to give our bodies what they want- food. As a result, when somebody else decides not to give us what we want or life circumstances decide or even God decides, we don't freak out, rage or go ballistic on Twitter. We've trained our souls to be happy and at peace even when we don't get our way. This is why fasting, when done rightly, is a pathway to freedom. Fasting is practising suffering. It's teaching our bodies to suffer. Suffering is unavoidable in life. Joy is not. In fasting, we're learning how to suffer with joy. What scripture reading is to our fight with the devil, a way to fill our minds with truth to combat his lies, fasting is to our fight with the flesh, a way to starve our flesh and weaken its hold over us.

## **Practically Speaking: What to Expect**

Expect to be hungry. Expect to be hangry. Expect to argue with yourself over the worth of fasting and your freedom in Christ, and how this isn't a requirement anyway. Expect to determine at some time in your fast that you believe fasting to be a stupid and pointless practice. Expect the devil to tempt you in abnormal ways with food. Expect to have some unusually bad days. A couple who practised a weekly fast every Thursday said that they came to expect that to be both the best and worst day of the week. Expect spiritual warfare. The powers of darkness do not desire for you to grow spiritually, find joy in suffering, or fight sin.

Fight these lies with prayer and scripture. Drink water. Pray to God for help. Become familiar with how enslaved you are to your physical impulses. Drink water. Keep your mind busy. Engage in something outside of yourself if you need to be distracted, like checking on a friend through text. Maybe have an accountability person that you encourage and seek in encouragement as you fast together. Drink water.

Use the time spiritually. It is easy to commit to a fast, and the day of not eating gets away from you with zero extra time spent in prayer. Be intentional with your time—particularly time you would have spent eating. Be prepared with some scripture (this guide, for instance!) and time alone. Maybe spend some time worshipping or go for a walk as you pray.

**Drink Water. Read Scripture. Pray. Have accountability/encouragement.**

**There is no such thing as failing! If you mess up one day and don't even attempt the next, jump back in for a day. If you can't do two weeks, do one day each of the two weeks.**

**JUST DO SOMETHING.**

# Rule of Life Builder

## Intro

### History and Purpose

A Rule of Life is a way of organizing the way you are pursuing spiritual formation into a rhythm of daily, weekly, monthly and yearly practices. It has a rich history in the church, documented all the way back to the Benedictine monks. Jesus and His followers lived their lives around certain practices that focused on intentional time with God through solitude, praying at certain set times in the day, fasting and other practices.

There are many lists of practices that can be used to guide you in building a Rule of Life for yourself. Choose some from these lists. Different people are wired for different things. It's best to do a combination of things that flow naturally for you and some that are outside of your natural bent. It's also good to combine some practices of abstinence and some of engagement. (These lists are not exhaustive.)

#### Practices of Engagement:

- scripture
- worship
- prayer
- service
- fellowship
- confession
- celebration

#### Practices of Abstinence:

- solitude
- silence
- fasting
- frugality

# Rule of Life Rhythms Ideas

## Daily

Daily Rhythms are intentional things you plan throughout your day to keep your heart focused and attuned to God. Historically, the church began with prayer and scripture to start the day with God, had a recentering time at midday to recalibrate your heart back to God, and a reflection time of prayer at the end of the day.

**Scripture:** Some people choose to meditate on a few verses daily and then do a bigger chunk of scripture in study form once a week. Some people prefer longer daily reading plans. Breadth and depth are both important when seeking God through His Word. Find whatever works best for your particular personality- the most important part is consistent interaction, not perfect goal meeting. Growing in knowledge of God's word is a marathon, not a sprint or race against others. Long obedience in the same direction is the goal.

**Prayer:** There are many different types of prayer, and all are important and necessary at different times.

Spontaneous, unceasing prayer flows out of disciplined, organized prayer. Some people pause at predictable intervals and pray the hours (Morning, Midday, Early Evening, and Night). Some people pray mostly on their scripture in the morning and focus mostly on intercession in the afternoon or evening. Some people rotate praying for different things each day (family, church, missions, nation...) The key again is consistently praying. As Tyler Staten says, start where you are, not where you aren't and start today not tomorrow.

## **Weekly**

Weekly rhythms are practices we incorporate weekly that help form us. You probably are already doing some of them. Maybe pray and see if God would like you to add one new one this year. Common weekly practices are:

- Sitting under preaching and worship through church
- Practicing a Sabbath rest day
- Community through a Life Group
- Fasting one meal or day a week
- Serving inside or outside of the church
- An hour of solitude and silence in a prayer room or outdoors

## **Monthly/Quarterly**

Monthly practices are bigger things we still schedule intentionally but not as often. There are many things this might be but some ideas are:

- A bigger service project (signing up to serve a meal at a partner organization, collecting something for a cause...)
- Setting aside an a day or afternoon to sit in the presence of the Lord
- Practicing hospitality by inviting someone into your home for dinner

## **Yearly**

These are bigger things you look at as you plan your Rule of Life, so that the years don't pass by without intentionally engaging in some bigger areas that you want to engage in that take some pre-planning. Things like:

- A mission trip
- A conference or retreat
- A weekend of retreat or solitude (or with your spouse) to focus on prayer, scripture, and listening

# Rule of Life Example

## Daily:

Morning- prayer and meditative Scripture reading  
Afternoon- pray on lunch break and read scripture  
Evening- Reflective prayer and confession

## Weekly:

Corporate worship and preaching on Sunday  
Community through LifeGroup  
Daytime fast on Thursday  
Sabbath rest on Sunday  
Hour of prayer in the prayer room

## Monthly:

Serve a meal at Immerse once a month  
Wake up and pray an hour in the middle of the night  
Set aside half a day one Saturday to read a  
Christian book  
Invite a neighbor over for dinner

## Yearly:

Go to a prayer conference  
Serve at VBS  
Fast for a bigger chunk of time

# Rule of Life Template

**Daily:**

**Weekly:**

**Monthly:**

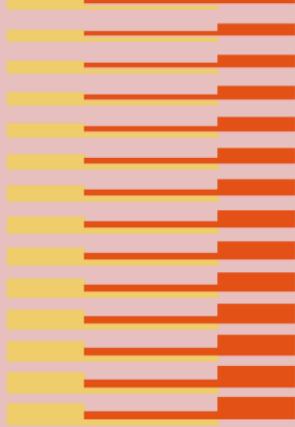
**Yearly:**

# A Note

Building a Rule of Life can feel like adding a heavy “yoke” when Jesus promised an easy yoke. A list of things to add to an already busy schedule can feel daunting. But it’s actually the exact opposite. Like a budget, it’s an attempt to run your time and spiritual life instead of letting them run you. Every part here is designed not to take from you but to give to you.

There is a Martin Luther quote that says, “I have so much to do today that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer.” In a similar spirit, George Müller said, “Four hours of work after an hour of prayer will accomplish more than five hours of work without prayer.” John Wesley believed this so much that he prayed for four hours a day. All of these men were deeply formed by the practices of Jesus, knowing that the source of strength to accomplish anything lies in the empowerment of the Spirit and walking with Him. They were also all incredibly busy men doing more in their lifetimes than most of us will ever dream.

It is not a resolution; it’s a reorienting. Use this time of fasting (whatever that ends up looking like for you- start where you are, not where you aren’t) to let God take you deeper in spiritual formation this year, not chasing perfect, but chasing His presence and purpose.



**Part One  
Days 1-4:**

**Release**

# Day 1: Repentance and Returning to Christ

“And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”  
Philippians 1:6

The church at Philippi was a beacon of light among the culture of its day. It stands apart as the church that Paul seemed to be most encouraged by because they truly were trying to live lives modeled after Jesus’ teaching. He was proud of them. He thanked God for the ways that they obeyed and tried to walk worthy of the calling they had been given- a calling to be the children of God.

Wherever you are in your journey of spiritual formation, a new year feels, well, new. It feels like a chance to have a fresh start and reorient. The holidays can tend to get us out of routine and out of our norm, which affects us both physically and spiritually. Too many sweets, both literally and metaphorically. That’s why we start gym membership and decide to only eat protein and drink massive amounts of water. We try to do the same spiritually, but without knowing where we’re trying to get, sometimes that can leave us feeling disoriented and uncertain of how to get to this elusive destination.

What if we approached this year differently, truly wanting to know as we are known? Maybe we could consider a different way. It’s harder, because relationship is always harder than box checking, but maybe if we want something that yields the life of abundance that we’re longing for, we have to stop trying the same ways. The definition of insanity, right?

One thing we see a lot of in scripture, even with Jesus, is that there was a lot of time spent in quiet, listening to that still small voice as it searched and revealed. This transforming we long for and the power that we seek takes more than a formulaic intake of certain things. It takes waiting and listening, stillness and wrestling. It takes the courage to allow our innermost parts to be seen and shown to us. It takes the willingness to actually throw off anything that is entangling us that is revealed in those moments of stillness, and let's be very clear, things will be revealed. It takes an open-handedness and willingness not to look like the world and chase after those things, living one foot in and one foot out. A reorienting of our time, money, and priorities in ways that stretch us.

Some of you will start here from a place of already knowing that abundant life. You have tasted and seen that the Lord is good, and you walk deeply in that intimate leading. How will God continue to grow and stretch you this year? What in this long life of sanctification will this year have you releasing, and what will it have you picking up to take another step forward as you grow more into His likeness?

He who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it. That hope should fill our souls with relief and joy, knowing that all of the ways we are grown this year will be because He holds us up, bringing to completion the good works He planned before the foundation of the earth was laid. Will you have the courage to walk in that plan? Let the overarching goal of your year, and your life, be more of His presence and to live for His purpose.

# Day 1 Reflection:

Reflect on the following questions with the leading of the Holy Spirit. Pray over them and ask Him to reveal the answers to you, without rushing the listening. Let your prayer be conversational—ask questions as things surface, respond with repentance or gratitude as He leads.

Where is your relationship with the Lord right now? What are the strong points that bring you delight, the places where you feel longing and genuine seeking, even if the results aren't perfect? (Longing and seeking matter more than boxes and outcomes.) What are the weak points? Be completely honest—nothing surprises God, and honesty brings change while pride holds us back.

This next one is harder. In what ways has your life begun to mirror the world more than the way of life Jesus taught and lived? This could be financial choices, how you spend your time, what you consume through media, vanity or pride, ignoring those in need, a haughty spirit... Today, we're simply naming and recognizing. Naming it doesn't mean committing to change today. It just means seeing your life clearly and asking God how He sees it.

Hardest of all—what blatant sin, already known to you, have you allowed to remain in your life? (Pornography or sexual sin, intentional lying, an affair, etc.) This one we don't just name—open, defiant sin will hinder any forward movement. Challenge yourself to speak its name (confession) and commit to being done with it (repentance). Confess it to someone trusted; invite a friend to help. Let today be the day you stop toying with that dragon and finally put it to death. Prayer, fasting, and Scripture will be essential.

He who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it. Rejoice in the forgiveness and fresh start He offers today and in how faithfully He pursues your heart.

# Day 2: Letting Go

“Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained.”

Philippians 3:13-15

It's easy to get stuck in a pattern of walking through life backwards, especially the older we get. Living life is beautiful and joyful, but it is also an accumulation of all sorts of grief and hurts. Every year we add, our bodies carry the weight of more loss. Regrets, relational rifts, and relationship loss through moving or death. Even the loss of opportunity and ability can leave us looking wistfully backward with either longing or shame. The weight of the curse can drag behind us like a ball of the past chained to our leg.

Paul exhorts us not to let it. He tells his friends in Philippi that all rear-facing glances have the potential to ensnare us, whether riding the coattails of past good deeds or letting the pain of past wounds engulf us, neither hastens our gait as we strive toward our goal- a life lived in sitting in the presence and living out the purpose of King Jesus.

A similar idea is presented in Hebrews 12:1 as the author urges us to throw off everything that so easily entangles us. The idea for both is modeled after runners willing to shed their clothes to increase their speed. How much science has gone into Olympic clothing to shave off microseconds of time? Is it more than the time spent examining our lives to see exactly what it is that slows us down?

Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, we press on.

The beautiful thing about those things in the rear-view mirror is that there is not one single one that Jesus doesn't provide an answer for.

Full of regret over past sin or failure? Confess, repent, and walk in the right direction. Jesus is not the one who keeps pointing you back to already forgiven sin and failure, and if He doesn't see it as valuable, maybe that should establish its value.

Filled with grief. Grieving is a part of life, and we have no greater comfort than the Comforter Himself, who catches our tears and writes about them in His book. He longs to carry you in your grief. And someday, when the season of grieving is over, He will carry that grief for you as He walks with you into the next leg of your race.

Holding on to someone's past sin against you? Jesus will fully judge that sin- either in hell or on the cross. They are either forgiven by Him or will bear the penalty, but no part of it will be influenced by your holding on to it. On top of which, you will never have to forgive anyone as much as God has forgiven you.

Is it more complicated than that? Yes. There are some hurts that scarred us, and the body can't help but remember. Some things take deep healing and involve great trauma. But also, no. Jesus really can heal the deepest parts of our hearts when we let Him. If the Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead lives within you, then the power to bring those dead parts of yourself back to life is already yours. Don't let your past rob you of what He has for you.

We have a Counselor, Comforter, High Priest, Saviour, and Judge who is fully able to hold every aspect of our past. So we let it go. We shed every extra bit of weight that the enemy longs to tie to us, but that drags down our pace, and we press on to what is ahead, running full steam, eyes fixed on the One who is worthy of our future.

# Day 2 Reflection:

Take a moment to still yourself and take some breaths to help you focus. Ask for the Spirit to guide you as you prayerfully consider these questions.

Is there any hurt in your past that you are still feeling weighed down by? Is there a particular action He is leading you to take to be able to move on, even if it is just trusting Him with it?

Is there any unforgiveness that you are holding in your heart, for others or yourself? How can you offer that forgiveness so that you are not held back by it? How can you accept forgiveness for yourself, trusting God's love and mercy for you?

Is there any regret from something done or left undone that is keeping you from walking in freedom and fully moving forward?

Is there a way that life hasn't met your expectations, and you are grieving the life you wanted God to have for you?

Take some time and pray through whatever God reveals, asking Him to help you fully release it.

# Day 3: Breaking Strongholds and Lies

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with Thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”

Philippians 4:6-8

Lies are such a dominant part of our lives that sometimes it's hard to even discern between them and the truth. We believe all kinds of things because they are so widely accepted as truths that we don't even notice.

We believe that aging is a negative thing and something to be fought or hidden.

We believe that we should cut people out of our lives if they are disturbing our peace.

We believe that we can buy happiness, and what we own matters.

We believe that comfort is important, and hardship is to be avoided.

We believe that God doesn't really care about us or really want our best.

But at the same time, we believe that God would never ask us to do really hard things, like stay in a hard marriage or spread the gospel in a dangerous situation.

We believe that people couldn't love us, or nobody really likes us, or we'll always be alone. That we couldn't be used by God.

Consumerism, sexual sin, anxiety, self-focus, racism, neglect of the poor- these things often plague us because we are believing things that aren't true about God or about who we are in the world.

Eve believed that God was withholding good from her. Samson believed God's path was making him miss out. Moses believed he wasn't skillful enough.

Solomon believed he had to fill his own life with good things and that those pleasures would satisfy him.

Elijah believed he was the only one who loved God.

Jonah believed God offered mercy too freely.

All of these people were being held back from what God wanted to do through them because they couldn't get away from the lies in their heads. It held them back from His presence as they pulled away from Him, and it held them back from His purposes as they couldn't believe in the things He was trying to do.

This is why we must be so careful with what we are allowing into our minds, because, despite our best efforts and intentions, those lies seep in and we are molded by them. Paul tells us to answer those lies with truth by focusing on things that are lovely, pure, and honorable. When scripture is coursing through our veins, it breaks down all of those deceptions that culture and sin and Satan constantly try to whisper to lure us away from our Edens and Sinai's and Ninevahs. As we constantly look at the things of God, we are able to release the lies that take hold of us, and walk, fully empowered, in the life God has for us, because He always will be working for our good and His glory.

# Day 3 Reflection:

Take a moment to ask God what lies you are believing in life. Ask Him to guide you through these questions.

What lies about who you are in Christ and how God loves you do you struggle with believing? How does this affect how you interact with God?

What are some lies that the world tells that you are tempted to believe about self, happiness, relationships, or possessions?

What areas of life do you struggle with anxiety, and what are some ways that believing lies is contributing to that?

Are lies affecting your marriage or other relationships?

Take some time to think through the lies you are tempted to believe and what the Bible says to those lies. Confess and release these things to God, asking Him to free you from things that are holding you back from His presence and purpose for your life.

# Day 4: Surrendering Control and Yielding Your Will

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

Philippians 2:5-8

In an individualistic society, it is easy to get swept up in the idea of charting our own course. We add God as an overarching theme, like the cartoon character decorations at a kid’s birthday party, but the party is still really all about us. We get wrapped up in our job trajectory, where we hope to live, what our favorite house style is, and which college our kids would flourish best at. Good questions. Good things. But not ultimate things. Our goals can start to mirror the society around us, and we become fixated on climbing ladders more than building kingdom bridges. Or we offer our lives up in segments, things that we’re willing to do... within limits.

One thing we quickly learn in life is that there are two kinds of friends. There are friends who will help you with whatever you need...if they are available. And there are drop anything friends. The kind of friends who will change their plans when you need something. Everybody wants a drop anything friend, but most people only experience “if I’m available” friendships, and maybe only offer them too.

The same could be said of Christians. There are “if I’m available” Christians and “drop anything” Christians.

I’ll teach a Sunday school class, if I’m able to make it work in my schedule.

I’ll spend that time in prayer, if I don’t have anything else going on.

And we miss the opportunity to rearrange our schedule and our lives for the better things God might have for us.

What if we asked different questions? What if instead of saying “Does this make sense?” or “Is this wise?” or “What will this cost me?” we had only one question, and we asked it every time.

Is God asking this of me?

It’s a revolutionary question, and it takes away all that illusory control we think we have in our lives, but what if it’s the only question that matters? What if we didn’t have to make up a plan for our lives because there was an adventure waiting for us that we were especially designed and equipped for, that was more satisfying, some might say more abundant than our controlled, orderly life?

So what if we approached the rest of this time of fasting and prayer with one question.....

What is God asking of me?

Maybe we’ll all be surprised by how He answers us....

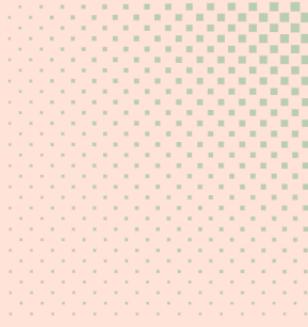
# Day 4 Reflection:

Take some time to think about that question. What feelings does it stir up? Take a deep breath and ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you consider these questions.

If a willing heart were a spectrum, where do you feel like you fall? This is between you and the Lord, so let Him lead you to make an honest assessment.

Ask Him to reveal what things you hold loosely and what things you hold too tightly. Remember, He is gentle and kind and isn't trying to take things from you. He only seeks to give you more. Keep that in mind as you listen to His answer.

Ask Him for the courage to loosen your hands through this journey. Maybe not open them completely yet, but to move a little further on the spectrum. Anything that is holding your heart in a way that holds it back from him, ask for the grace to cling less tightly to and let him take the reins.



## **Part 2 Days 5-8:**

# **Practicing the Presence**

# Day 5: Practicing Daily Presence with Christ

“Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me- put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.”

Philippians 4:9

When we look at a verse like this, we might be tempted to think that Paul was only talking about outside behaviour. They were to do the good works they saw him doing, avoid the bad things they saw him avoiding. But that wasn't the only thing Paul wanted the church to model. They also saw the way he was living and put into practice the things they saw Paul practicing. It was a whole, inseparable life with good works and fleeing sin flowing out of the life tethered to Christ.

In the Didache (a book of early teachings the church used), praying three set times a day was considered the norm. The apostles themselves prayed “the hours” (set times of day for prayer- usually 9 am, noon, and 3 pm). It was in praying at a set time that Peter received his vision about the inclusion of the Gentiles. It was on the way to the set prayer time that Peter and John healed the beggar. Jesus had set times of prayer that would have followed the Jewish tradition, and we see recordings of him praying in the morning and at night. As Paul talks about, they prayed psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs together. These traditions were what developed the early structures of the monks' prayers and went on to become the model for things like the Book of Common Prayer.

Paul himself said about prayer, we are to “pray without ceasing”, give “constant thanksgiving”, intercede for others for salvation, wisdom, and unity. He prayed for boldness and unity in his own ministry, prayed for health and travel, had outbursts of praise, prayed for his hardships, and prayed for spiritual growth. He also practiced hospitality, community, frugality, fasting, solitude, and silence.

When Paul wanted the church to practice what they saw him practicing, he meant it holistically. A life that flowed with the presence of God, who would provide them the peace and strength to live the lives He had for them.

If we went to the doctor for a rash, but the rash was caused by a food allergy, and yet the doctor kept treating it with a topical cream, there would come a point where we would realize that we need a more holistic approach. We have to get to the root of the problem and the source of healing.

But that’s how we approach the Christian life so often. We try to treat the symptoms of sin or do the good deeds, but we aren’t tapping into the source of healing in the ways it’s been prescribed.

Daily hooked up to the Father.  
Like branches on a vine.

# Day 5 Reflection:

Take a moment to still yourself before the Lord.

How often do you currently sit in the presence of God through prayer, scripture reading, silence, and solitude? Do you feel more empowered the times you do?

How could God be leading you this year to spend more time getting to know Him more deeply through time with Him?

Ask the Spirit to increase your longing for knowledge and communion with God this year.

# Day 6: Joy in Christ's Nearness

”Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.” Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 4:4-7

If you are an astute observer, you will notice that yesterday's verse and today's verses both end with Paul saying that the peace of God will be with them. First (or really second because we did them in reverse order), by putting into practice the things Paul has shown them, and now by taking everything that makes us anxious to God through prayer and looking to Him to overcome our anxiety with His perfect peace.

It is really easy to get into a pattern of anxiety and negativity. Sometimes, a new year is a good opportunity to reset our thinking and infuse it with a little clean slate/new hope adrenaline. But sometimes we carry that negativity right into the new year with us.

“This year probably won’t be any better,” tucked some of us in on New Year’s Eve and woke us up on New Year’s morning. The world felt a bit tipsy last year, and we aren’t sure what could come next, so we make jokes about calamities not being on our bingo cards, and funny memes help us maintain humor in our cynicism.

The church at Philippi was no stranger to a world that felt tipsy. Whatever failings our leaders tend to have, I don’t think any of us want to live under Emperor Nero. In a highly patriotic colony, with persecution threatening any who said “Jesus is Lord”, the church at Philippi knew what it meant to have joy and thanksgiving despite trying circumstances. Paul told them the source of peace when chaos is engulfing is to be near to Christ, filled with the Spirit.

We can’t control what the year ahead will bring. Not in our country, not in the world, not in our church, and not in our own lives. It’s not in our capacity. You could check every box on your “get healthy” plan, and your health could fail you this year. You could determine to organize your life through a decluttering plan, and all of your possessions be swept away. We have that little actual control. But we can control our nearness to Christ. We can control how much we interact with Him and how much we depend on Him. We can control if He’s the person we run to when we’re scared, sad, or confused.

And though that may seem like a last-ditch, lesser thing, it actually is the better thing. We are able to control where we set our hope and whether we spin our wheels towards a false sense of power, or set them firmly on the rock where they can never ever be misplaced because it only ever brings life. We will never regret rerouting our hopes and efforts to a source that always looks back to us in love and never fails. To a source that can hold us in peace and steadiness when the illusion of the rest of it crumbles. A source that never tires of hearing from us and never looks at us with contempt or derision. The source of all power has given us an open invitation to choose His presence this, and every year. This and every day. What privilege we have to be called, children of God.

# Day 6 Reflection:

Take a moment to ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you reflect on the following questions.

What is an area in your life where you do not feel peace? It could be work, finances, relational, health-something that burdens your mind and worries your heart?

What would it look like to have the peace of Christ in that situation?

How are you currently approaching the throne? Is it with boldness, intimacy, and wrestling? Or is it formal and lacking in familiarity?

Ask God to grow your understanding and practice of time with Him to be deeper in joy, love, and closeness this year.

# Day 7: It is God Who Works in You

“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” Philippians 2:12-13

Two things can be true at the same time. Such it is with sanctification. It is God who works in us, and yet we must walk in obedience. A paradox of sorts.

Pastor Jason spoke recently of how the desire to “recommit” ourselves to the Lord usually means we want to try harder, but that this is putting the cart before the horse. Without the Holy Spirit working within us, there is no hope for change. The work that happens in our hearts and minds and even behaviors is the outward fruit of a life changed by the Spirit and formed in His love.

But it is also true that we must work. We must work to stay in His presence. We must work to know Him deeply. We must work to fellowship with other believers and let ourselves be accountable to one another. We must work to confess and repent and abide.

DA Carson said so eloquently, “People do not drift toward holiness. Apart from grace-driven effort, people do not gravitate toward godliness, prayer, obedience to scripture, faith, and delight in the Lord. We drift toward compromise and call it tolerance; we drift toward disobedience and call it freedom; we drift toward superstition and call it faith.

We cherish the indiscipline of lost self-control and call it relaxation; we slouch toward prayerlessness and delude ourselves into thinking we have escaped legalism; we slide toward godlessness and convince ourselves we have been liberated.”

More anciently, St. Ignatius said, “Pray as though everything depended on God; act as though everything depended on you.”

In one of the mysterious ways of a God that is high above us in thought and deed, the plan is that we must pursue the change that we cannot work in ourselves.

And we pursue it in a person.

Knowing Jesus deeply and becoming like Him is none of our effort and all of our effort at the same time. It is resting in the complete power and work of the One that we are putting every drop of energy into, tightly clinging to. If you were in a movie and being saved by Superman, you would cling to him with every bit of desperation you had as he flew through the air, but you’re not flying. You would just know that separation from him would mean falling.

We put all of our hope in the clinging. The holding fast. Fixing our eyes. Setting our minds. Looking to Jesus. Seeking first. Walking by faith. The language of scripture is the language of an uncertain child clinging to a parent's hand and looking up at their face for confidence as they are guided through a crowded room. The language of loving reliance and desperate hope. The language of love and devotion and fear and faith. May we learn to walk worthy because we cling to what is worthy and are dragged through His footsteps until they are our own.

# Day 7 Reflection:

Ask God to guide your thoughts as you consider the following questions.

Has your understanding of faith and works been skewed in an unbiblical way that has affected how you interact with God? (maybe through past teaching or growing up with unbiblical ideas)

In what ways are you clinging to your own effort of faith, and in what ways are you pressing in to God as the author and finisher of your faith?

Ask God to reveal what parts of your heart tend toward an unhealthy legalism and what parts tend toward an unhealthy “freedom” mentality. What areas could you pull away from either of those two extremes by releasing effort or pressing in to discipline, whatever the case may be? Pray for God to grow in you a desire for His nearness and to grow your awareness of your need to cling tightly to Him, or abide.

# Day 8: Learning to hear God and so renew Your Mind

“But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.” Philippians 3:13-15

Sometimes seeking God can feel a bit elusive. Like we’re chasing some magic formula or trying to find the end of a rainbow. Can it be found?

Here is a really hard but true thing that we all need to hear: the reason finding God feels elusive is that we are trying to find Him in the middle of living a regular life, and He will never be found as an add-on.

In Jeremiah, God says that we will seek Him and find Him when we seek Him with all of our hearts.

He isn’t elusive, but He is jealous for every part of us. He is found in the gentle whisper of a still small voice that can’t be heard over an overcrowding of noise. If we are wanting “Jesus and” as an extra to everything else then we are always going to be disappointed that we don’t hear Him. He chases after us, certainly, but if every time He chases we say no, we lose our ability to hear that call.

But.

When we seek Him with all of ourselves, we will find that He longs for us to find Him. He actually longs for us to respond by moving toward Him because He was the One who moved toward us first. In James, he promises generous wisdom. In Revelation, He says He is knocking at the door, and if we open it, He will gladly come in and dine with us. Do we want to dine with Jesus? If that were a literal door, would we ever leave it closed? Then why do we say no to opening with our time, money, and hearts?

Paul says when we are seeking the Lord, He will reveal the path to us. He will show us wisdom and set us right when we are on the wrong path, revealing the correct way to us. God is not a trickster. He's not trying to hide His will from us or confuse us. He loves us and longs to show us things. He wrote a book for that express purpose and preserved it over centuries, compiling and translating it and getting it into your hands because He wants to be known by you.

There are many books written on hearing from God, but here is what the book God wrote says about how to hear from Him:

*We will seek Him, and find him, when we seek Him with all of our hearts.*

# Day 8 Reflection:

Sit with God today and ask Him if there are any ways you are not seeking Him with your whole heart. Are there things you need to add or delete to hear from Him more clearly? Let Him show you gently anything He wants to reveal. Ask Him to teach you to hear His voice and to learn to discern it from the noise (even good noise!) all around.

## **Part 3 Days 9-12:**

## **Living with Purpose**

# Day 9: Knowing Christ as the Center of Purpose

“But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him.” Philippians 3:7-9

When light appeared on the road to Damascus, it changed the entire trajectory of a life. Whatever aspirations Paul was working towards, they were erased in that moment. Dreams of prestige and position among the religious elite. His ten-year plan. Everything he had been working toward throughout his life suddenly became unimportant. Can you imagine spending years training and working towards a certain position at work and deciding abruptly to walk away from it all? It's easy to read the Bible in hindsight and feel like those decisions were easy and obvious and quickly made, but if they were, it was only because the power of the encounter made walking away and dropping nets seem like a no-brainer.

Although there are not usually blinding lights filled with the voice of Jesus, we faced the same crossroads in our lives when we encountered the only One who can give life purpose. The invitation to die to ourselves and our dreams for our life, and instead to make spreading God's light into the world our reason for living.

And it wasn't a one-time choice. We keep making it over and over, just like Paul did. He chose to give up security and status for a life of running, rejection, abuse, and imprisonment, and he looked back and said that the first life that he had worked so hard to build was rubbish compared to the new one.

We might not be inclined to look at someone with such a life and say it was rubbish. We may actually say they were doing pretty well or be tempted to long for it to be together, but seeing Jesus clarified reality for Paul in a way that earthly things never had. When he became blind, his eyes were opened, and he finally saw his life for what it really was- a life designed with purpose in mind.

The beautiful and amazing reality is that God made us for so much more than what we could ever plan for ourselves. It's not overstating it to say that we are destined for cosmically significant plans that were laid at the beginning of time.

In his book *The Overcomers*, Matt Chandler talks about how we are made for this exact moment in time. Not Paul, not Peter, not Moses or Elijah. He says, "You were made for this moment, and this moment was made for you."

What will this year hold? Surviving the rat race? A year of fear, discouragement, and disillusionment with life, just going through the motions.

Or could it be different? Could this be the year that we join with Paul and say, "Whatever gain I had I count it as loss next to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus."

Counting all loss except one goal: To know Jesus and make Him known.

# Day 9 Reflection:

Take a moment to think about Paul's life and what it must have looked like before and after his conversion. Think about your own life. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your heart as you reflect.

What was your story like before and after conversion? Was it a drastic change? A slow but steady change? Every process of sanctification looks different; reflect on yours with gratitude for the ways God has patiently led you in life.

What has your path been further along since conversion? Have you viewed your life as a life filled with the power of God and intended for the purposes of God? Has His great adventure captured your heart and put a burning in your soul to live a life consumed with knowing Him and making Him known, spreading His goodness and love to all the places trapped in darkness? Or have you settled for a temporary life filled with things that moth and rust destroy?

God has more for us than we could ever dream for ourselves. If our lives look stale, that's not from Him. He came to give us life, abundantly. For your own joy, settle for nothing less.

# Day 10: Pressing into God's Direction

"Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." Philippians 3:12-14

It's one thing to say we're ready to live out God's purpose for our lives, but it's harder to know what that is specifically. God wants us to live a life loving Him and loving others, but what does that look like in my life? This is overcomplicated by the fact that the internet has given us the ability to see what God's purpose for everyone else looks like and the needs of not just those around us, but those everywhere. We could spend our entire day scrolling through social media and the news and praying for needs and never come to the end of it.

So how do we know what God wants for our lives?

There are some things that are clear in scripture, and some things that aren't specific, so we start with the specifics and let God guide us to the unclear.

For sure, we are to care for our church body, to put others before ourselves, to be generous with our money, to be hospitable and welcome people into our homes, to care for the poor and the fatherless and the widow, to take the gospel to the nations, to care for the persecuted, and to take care of our families.

That's the certain part. If there are poor people in your life or people struggling in the church or people in your family who have needs, those are the places you for sure intervene. It's already been mapped out, and doing it is less a matter of calling than of biblical obedience. So part of God's will for our lives is what author Bob Goff calls having our "heads on a swivel," constantly looking for the good that can be done around us, never missing an opportunity to love others. Being kind to someone who's having a bad day, talking to them, and praying for them. Taking a meal to someone who is sick or overwhelmed. Offering to watch kids or mow a lawn.

And then there are specific things that God has for us. Some will foster or adopt. Others will be missionaries. Others will mentor inner-city kids or tutor them in school. Some will serve in food pantries, homeless shelters, or prisons. This is where it gets more specific and more confusing, because which one of the many options is the one, and how do we know a specific calling is for us?

This is one reason the abiding is so important. When we are asking each day for our "daily bread," we aren't just asking for physical provision, but spiritual also. A daily amount of the fruit of the Spirit. Wisdom for the day. Eyes to see on that day what God has in front of us. And as we learn to hear that daily voice that urges us to pause and press in in different situations, we will learn to hear the bigger things. As we offer our ear in silence and solitude, and say yes to the consistent things He's asking of us, we learn to hear the ways He's guiding us, and His will becomes less fuzzy. It's much more about showing up over and over with listening ears to prayer and His Word, and being available to be interrupted. It's part of being faithful in the small things, and then being entrusted with more.

As Peterson called it, long obedience in the same direction.

# Day 10: Reflection

Take a moment to ask God to open your eyes and “put your head on a swivel” for what He has for you today.

Who in your life is going through something and needs some encouragement today? Could you text them or send them a card? What about taking them a meal or offering to babysit? Talk it over with the Lord and ask Him to guide you in how to help them. And pray for them! That is the first line of help always.

Do you know your neighbors? Have you been in each other's homes? Whom could you invite for dinner, or to go on a walk, or to play with kids in the yard? If you don't live near people, who is someone you know from work or somewhere else you could invite over?

Ask God if there are any obvious things that are in front of you that have slipped your attention (as they do all of ours!). Find ways to be intentional today.

If you feel a particular leading towards something that feels more uncertain, pray for clarity and leave it with God while you are faithful in the certain.

# Day 11: Establishing a Rule of Life

“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.” Philippians 1:27

A Rule of Life for a Christian is a deliberate, prayerfully chosen pattern of practices that helps a person or community walk with God faithfully and consistently. It's not a list of laws, but a framework for discipleship—a way of ordering life around loving God and others. It's similar to a budget where you tell your money where to go instead of it telling you. A rule of life helps to tell your time where to go instead of it telling you. It helps you be intentional in how you are pursuing a life modeled after Christ.

Author Justin Whitmel Earley says, “To follow Jesus is not just to believe in his life; it is also to follow him into his lifestyle....The things we do shape the person we become. Your heart follows your habits.”

If we want to sit in the presence of God, if we want to live out His purposes, we have to put ourselves in the way of the things that will get us there. That's all a rule of life is. Maybe you've had one for years, a life built around habits of scripture, prayer, and hospitality. Or maybe this is your first experience thinking through this. Wherever you are, spend some time thinking and dreaming with God for the year ahead.

# Day 11 Reflection:

Use the guide at the beginning of the book to start to form a Rule of Life. Do this slowly and prayerfully, asking God what areas He wants to use to form you and the habits that would be most helpful for you to follow.

# Day 12: Living Sent with Purpose - To Live Is Christ

“Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” Philippians 1:18-21

A long time ago, man was created with the plan for him to rule the earth and have dominion over it on God’s behalf. The fullness of that plan was lost to a curse, but a plan of rescue was instituted to reclaim the earth from the prince of darkness and reinstate the original mission of humanity, restoring man’s place in God’s presence and re-establishing man’s purpose.

If our lives have begun to look less like a cosmic fantasy adventure and more like a clean cut, orderly, ordinary human existence, it’s not because the former is not true; it’s because the enemy has worked very hard to make it seem like the temporary life we see with our eyes is all there is. Just like in *The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian*, a world that was once filled with “magic” and mystery has come to a standstill as people have traded talking animals and moving trees for ordinary lives.

But just because we don’t see a thing, doesn’t make it not true.

We are living out a supernatural story that is filled with armies and battles, good and evil. The fight for the world is the war that is made of a million battles for our hearts and minds.

Just because we don't see it, doesn't make it not true.

The biggest way to waste our lives is to be like the people of Narnia, eating and drinking and not knowing what it was meant to be. We are Prince Caspian, rightful heirs, and taking back our position.

Jesus won for us on the cross, the ability and authority to reclaim the darkness for the light. Every day we are faced with choices to stake that claim and plant the flag of His kingdom. In our homes, in our neighborhoods, in our cities, and in our country. In the world. To take His name and love forward. Will we abdicate the position given to us to live ordinary lives? Or will we pick up a sword and put on a helmet and start to see our existence for what it truly is? The prince of this world would love for our eyes to be closed, lulled to sleep by the feasts of the table of Narnia. But there is a way to live fully. You experienced some of it in these twelve days of prayer and fasting. A way to face the world, empowered and amplified by the Spirit of God. This year, step into your life and the things God has for you with eyes wide open. Don't settle for ordinary, but with eyes on eternity, learn to say with Paul:

To live is Christ, to die is gain.

# Day 12 Reflection:

Sit with God today and reflect on your time of prayer and fasting these last 12 days. How were you better able to fight sin? How did it increase your ability to hear His voice? What did you learn in that time, and where did He lead you?

May this time of fasting have been a blessing that leads you deeper into a life marked by the passionate pursuit of knowing God and making Him known.

# Scripture and Prayer Resources

Lectio365 App (has a daily morning, midday and evening prayer and scripture read by people with cool accents to calming music)

The Bible Project App

Worship Initiative [sing.theworshipinitiative.com](http://sing.theworshipinitiative.com) (This is a daily devotional with Shane and Shane where they go through scripture and worship together.)

Practicing the Way- follow on Instagram for ongoing resources geared towards the spiritual practices

Books on Prayer:

*Praying Like Monks, Living Like Fools* by Tyler Staten

## Further Reading on Spiritual Practices

*Practicing the Way* by John Mark Comer

*Spirit of the Disciplines* by Dallas Willard

*Celebration of Discipline* by Richard Foster

# Lectio Divina Guide

Lectio Divina simply means “divine reading” and is a method of reading scripture that combines reading and prayer with the purpose of really chewing over what you are reading and taking it in with guidance from the Spirit. It really is simple, and you probably already somewhat do it naturally. There are four steps.

## **1. Reading (Lectio)**

You read a short passage slowly

## **2. Reflect (Meditatio)**

Take a moment to pray for the Holy Spirit to draw anything He wants to highlight to you as you re-read the scripture. Try to slow down and really imagine the setting, scenery or emotions. Why was this being written? Who was reading it? Put yourself in the story as you think about it more deeply.

## **3. Respond (Oratio)**

Read back through the passage, this time stopping after different phrases and praying through them conversationally, either asking God to help you understand them or submitting to Him through what you’ve read or even just being thankful for what you are reading about.

## **4. Reflect (Meditatio)**

It is very easy to quickly check off our Bible reading, read it, and walk away. Take a few minutes to think about the passage you’ve read and let the Spirit guide your thoughts, showing you what He wants to teach you.

# Daily Examen Guide

The Daily Examen was an Ignatian prayer method used to review your day with God. It can be a helpful tool to learn to sift back through your day when you're going to bed at night.

1. Pray for Presence: start by asking God for the grace to see your day through His eyes.
2. Give thanks: Look back with gratitude, acknowledging God's gifts, joys, and how He worked in your day, even in small things.
3. Review the Day (Awareness): Walk through your day, noticing moments where you felt close to God or far from Him.
4. Face Your Emotions/Forgiveness: focus on key moments and feelings. Ask for forgiveness for failures and offer thanks for blessings, inviting God into your struggles.
5. Look Toward Tomorrow/Hope: ask God for the grace needed for the next day, anticipating challenges and opportunities, and committing to live more aligned with His will.

This is about finding God, not a performance review. Let it lead you to confession/repentance, but also to gratitude and joy in the good things.

